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ABSTRACT

The effect of counselors' level of experience on clients' expression of feeling has not been investigated using stylistic and semantic measures. To examine the influence of affectively oriented counselors' level of experience, six counselors at three experience levels (low--masters, counseling practicum students; medium--doctoral, counseling psychology students; and high--licensed experienced psychologists) were randomly assigned a male and female client from 12 student volunteers. Each counselor/client dyad met for a guided fantasy experience followed by discussion. Counselors were instructed to facilitate clients' expression of feeling stimulated by the fantasy experience. Transcripts of the sessions were processed by the Computer Assisted Language Analysis System (CALAS). The language of the sessions was analyzed for stylistic complexity, as measured by total clauses and average block length, and semantics as measured by block length and verb type. Results showed the six counselors at the three experience levels were similar when compared on these measures. Counselors and clients did not differ in speech rate clauses per minute across or within groups, or in complexity of language across groups. There were significant differences on two verb types--state experiencer affective and state experiencer cognitive. When examining the ranks of these two verb types, the difference could not be attributed to the difference in experience levels of the counselors. On percentage of counselor talk, the two low experience counselors were similar, and the two medium experience counselors were similar, but there was a significant difference between the two high experience counselors. This suggests that high experience counselors may have more idiosyncratic styles. (JAC)

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A Linguistic Analysis of Counselor's Affect Oriented Responses Across Three Levels of Counseling Experience

by

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Paper written for the symposium on Research on Language Analysis in Counseling. Session to be conducted at the 1984 Annual Meeting of The American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the semantic and stylistic characteristics of affectively oriented counselors at three levels of experience whose intention was to facilitate their client's expression of feeling. The effects of the counselor's level of experience has not yet been investigated using these specific linguistic measures.

In investigating the process of counseling, it is helpful to use a theoretical framework which can be generalized across various theoretical approaches. This can be accomplished by relying upon a social influence description of the counseling situation and a linguistic model for understanding verbal influence processes (Patton & Meara, 1982). An in-depth discussion of the social influence and linguistic models upon which this research is based is detailed elsewhere in Meara & Patton, (1984).

In studying the effects of the counselor's level of experience on facilitating client's expression of feeling we decided to analyze the language of twelve counseling sessions using stylistic and semantic measures of the following types:

1. Stylistic complexity as measured by the total clauses (CLT) spoken in a given time period which indicates the frequency of speech. Higher CLT is an indication of greater complexity because it indicates that a greater amount of information must be processed by the listener in a given time period (Wycoff, Davis, Hector, & Meara, 1983). Related to CLT is the measurement of the percentage of counselor talk per counseling session. Using these measures we get an indication of how complex a speaker's language is and what percentage of the total session the speaker talked.
2. Stylistic complexity as measured by average block length (ABL), which is a ratio measure obtained by dividing a speaker's CLT for a given

time period by that speaker's total main clauses (CLM) for that time period. According to Cook (1979), ABL is devised by assuming that a main clause and its cluster of dependent clauses constitute an information block which the listener must process one clause at a time in order to understand what the speaker is saying. Therefore higher ABL indicates more complex language. The simplest style is represented by the number 1, which indicates that the speaker is using only one clause in each sentence (Wycoff et al., 1983).

3. Semantics as measured by verb type. Chafe (1970) suggests that meaning in the deep structure of the English language is signaled by inherent semantic relators, or verb phrases, which describe the relation between named things, or noun phrases. The type of verb phrase chosen is a signal to the listener about the meaning the speaker intends to communicate. Thus, different types of verb phrases can be used by the speaker to signal different intentions. The pattern of verb phrases used by the speaker then becomes a type of informative display to the listener. A case grammar model of language modified from Cook (1979) identifies three basic and two interactive types of verb phrases. The three basic types of verb phrases are 1) state verbs which define "a particular noncasual relation between persons or things, or the state or property of such an object" (Meara et al., 1981, p. 113), 2) process verbs which define "a casual relation without specification of an agent in which something is happening to a person or thing" (Meara et al., 1981, p. 113), and 3) action verbs which define "a casual relation with specification of an agent in which a person or thing does something (optionally, to somebody or something)" (Meara et al., 1981, p. 113).

In addition to these basic verb phrase types, the modified verb matrix includes two types of interactive verb phrases which form compounds with the basic types. These are experiential and benefactive verbs. "Experiential verbs define relations in which states of feelings, sensing, or knowing are attributed, or acts of consciousness or awareness are imputed, to a person or thing" (Meara et al., 1981, p. 113). "Benefactive verbs define a relation in which persons or things are identified as beneficiaries of a state, action, or process. (They) connote ownership or possession of, or that someone or something has benefited from, someone or something" (Meara et al., 1981, p. 113).

The adapted versions of the interactive verb types are as follows:

> "a) state experiential verbs define cognitive or affective states. . .; b) state benefactive verbs define states of ownership. . .; c) process experiential verbs define the experiencing of a sensory/perceptual activity. . .; d) process benefactive verbs define a process that is of benefit to someone or something. . .; e) action experiential verbs define an action that provides an experience to a person or thing. . .; and f) action benefactive verbs define an action that benefits someone or something" (Meara et al., 1981, pp. 113-114).

The modified verb matrix thus has nine verb types as displayed in the diagram below. The verb types in each category can be summed to give a total for that category. For example, state basic, state experiential, and state benefactive verbs can be added to give the total state verbs. Also, state experiential, process experiential, and action experiential verbs can be added to give the total experiential verbs. Thus compound verbs are counted in both categories, for example, action benefactive verbs would be counted in both the action and benefactive verb category totals (Meara et al., 1981). CALAS (described

below) further categorizes state experiential verbs as either affective or cognitive.

Modified Verb Matrix After Cook (1979)

	BASIC	EXPERIENTIAL	BENEFACTIVE
STATE	State Basic	State Experiential	State Benefactive
PROCESS	Process Basic	Process Experiential	Process Benefactive
ACTION	Action Basic	Action Experiential	Action Benefactive

A computer assisted language analysis system (CALAS), consisting of a set of computer programs and an algorithm for translating English language texts into structural equivalents has been developed to analyze stylistic and semantic characteristics of language (Rush et al., 1974, Note 1). There are three distinct sequential operations: a) Eyeball, which translates the text into grammatical counterparts; b) Phraser, which groups the grammatical class assignments into phrases; and c) Claus and Case, which groups the phrases into clauses and assigns labels derived from case grammar to each phrase in the clause. After each operation, the system provides for human editing to increase the accuracy of input into the next phase (Wycoff et al., 1983).

The specific verb types we focused on in this study were state basic, state experiencer affective, state experiencer cognitive, action basic, and action experiencer.

sed on previous research, we predict that:

1. As experience level increases, stylistic complexity as measured by CLT and ABL will decrease, and percentage of counselor talk with decrease.

Based on the relatively simple styles of Rogers and Perls in comparison to Ellis (Meara et al., 1979) and the relatively simple style of high vs. low empathic responders (Wycoff et al., 1983), it is hypothesized that affectively oriented counselors have a relatively simple linguistic style. However those with lower levels of experience are not expected to focus as consistently on feelings as more experienced counselors and therefore are epxected to use the more complex style associated with cognitive approaches and with lower empathy ratings.

2. As the counselor's experience level increases, the use of state basic and state experiencer affective verbs will decrease. Affectively oriented counselors such as Rogers (Meara et al., 1981) and unidentified client-centered counselors (Bieber, 1978, Note 2) were repectively found to use more state verbs than Ellis or Perls (Meara et al., 1981) or a psycholanalytic counselor (Bieber, 1978, Note 2). Client-centered and psychoanalytic counselors have been found to use state experiencer affective and state basic verbs when dealing with feelings, and to use state basic verbs when dealing with general inner states. They have also been found to use action basic verbs to deal with action and state experiencer cognitive verbs to deal with thoughts (Bieber, 1978, Note 2). High empathic responders were found to use less action verbs than low empathic responders (Wycoff et al., 1983). Since experienced affectively oriented counselors intending to facilitate client feelings are expected to be more consistent than inexperienced affectively oriented counselors in dealing with feelings rather than thoughts or actions, it is hypothesized that experienced counselors will use higher levels of state basic and state experiencer affective verbs and lower

levels of action basic and state experiencer cognitive verbs than less experienced counselors.

METHOD

Subjects

Counselors were six volunteers, one female and one male at each of three levels of experience; a) low experience level was defined as masters counseling practicum students, b) medium experience level was defined as doctoral counseling psychology students who have completedone year of doctoral practicum, and c) high experience level was defined as licensed counseling psychologists with at least five years of post-doctoral experience in counseling. Counselors were matched for theoretical orientation using Biskin's (Note 3) adaptation of Peterson's and Bradley's (1980) psychotherapy questionnaire.

Clients were six male and six female college student volunteers solicited from educational psychology classes. Clients were interviewed by an advanced counseling psychology student and selected for the study if they showed no signs of significant pathology, appeared willing to discuss personal material, and seemed to feel comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings.

Procedures

Clients were solicited from educational psychology classes by one of the authors. They were screened by a confederate according to predetermined criteria discussed above.

Counselors were solicited by one of the authors from the master's counseling students at a large southern university, doctoral counseling psychology students at the same univeristy, and licensed counseling psychologists practicing at the university counseling center. Prospective counselors were administered a counseling orientation inventory (Biskin, Note 3; Peterson and Bradley, 1980). One female

and one male counselor at each experience level whose highest score was on the client-centered or gestalt subscale and whose scores were above 3.5 on both subscales were selected from the available pool of volunteers to participate in the study.

One female and one male client were randomly assigned to each counselor. Each client-counselor dyad met at the student counseling center for a guided fantasy experience led by a counseling psychology graduate student at the post-internship level who is experienced in the use of guided fantasy. She first helped the subjects relax using a standard relaxation script and then asked them to imagine a scene as she described it. Each dyad heard the same fantasy so that there would be less variability in the issues discussed in the counseling sessions.

Following the fantasy experience, each dyad met separately in an office at the counseling center for about fifty minutes to process the fantasy experience. The counselors were instructed to facilitate the client's expression of feelings stimulated by the fantasy. All individual sessions were audio-taped. Following the counseling session, counselors and clients were asked to evaluate the counseling session in writing. The clients then met briefly with the fantasy leader for debriefing. Any client who wished to talk about the experience further was given an appointment with the fantasy leader or one of the authors. If the client expressed the desire for on-going counseling during the follow-up appointment, a referral was made to a member of the counseling center staff.

The audio tapes were transcribed by persons familiar with working with confidential material. The transcripts were checked for accuracy by the authors who listened to the tapes while reading the transcripts, made corrections, and disguised any identifying information. The transcripts were entered into the computer for processing via the CALAS. Editing was done by two persons familiar with the CALAS and with case grammar.

Results

The frequency of verb usage for the seven category totals was compared for counselors across three experience levels using a Kruskal-Wallis One-way Analysis of Variance of Ranks (Siegal, 1956). Table 1 displays the results. The percentage of each verb type used by each counselor were computed. These are obtained by dividing the counselor's verb type frequency by the counselor's total occurrences and then multiplying by 100 (Meara et al., 1981). The percentages were then ranked and the analysis computed. The counselors at the three experience levels differd significantly in the use of state experiencer cognitive verbs ($H=6.5$, $p < .067$) and state experiencer affective verbs ($H=7.07$, $p < 0.67$).

We predicted that the more experienced counselors would use more state basic and state experiencer affective verbs and fewer action basic and state experiencer cognitive verbs. At first glance it looks as if part of our prediction was accurate, but when we examined the ranks we found that the differences could not be attributed to the experience level variable. For example, if experience level were the important variable the high experience level counselors' use of state experiencer cognitive verbs would rank 1st and 2nd of the six counselors. However, the high experience level counselors ranked 1st and 5th in their use of state experiencer cognitive verbs. Also based on our predictions high experience level counselors would have ranked 5th and 6th in their use of state experiencer affective verbs. However, they ranked 1st and 6th.

Thus there are differences in usage of two verb types, state experiencer cognitive and state experiencer affective, but these differences cannot be attributed to the manipulation of the experience level variable.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Stylistic Measures

The average block lengths (ABL), speaker's total clauses divided by speaker's main clauses, of each counselor were compared using a Kruskal-Wallis One-Way Analysis of Variance of Ranks. There were no significant differences found ($p < .20$).

Total clauses per minute (CLT) for each counselor were compared using a Kruskal-Wallis and no significant differences were found ($p < .20$), and total clauses per minute for each client were compared using a Kruskal-Wallis and no significant differences were found ($p < .20$).

Percentage of counselor talk across experience levels was compared using a X^2 of proportion (Siegal, 1956). The obtained $X^2 = 41$, $df=5$, was significant at the $p < .001$ level. Further analysis revealed that the two low experience level counselors were not significantly different from each other, that the two medium experience level counselors were not significantly different from each other, but that the two high experience level counselors were significantly different from each other ($X^2 = 21.6$, $p < .001$). These similarities and difference are illustrated by the graph in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

This analysis suggests that the high experience level counselors may have more idiosyncratic styles. The counselors at all levels were matched on theoretical orientation, therefore what they think is important in counseling is the same. However, what high experience level counselors do in a counseling session to meet their goals is perhaps less "by the book" and more like their individual personalities.

Discussion (Summary)

In essence, the six counselors at three experience levels were similar when compared using the above masures. Counselors and clients did not differ in speech rate (clauses per minute) across or within groups. Counselors did not differ in complexity of language (ABL) across groups.

Of the seven verb types of interest to us in this study, there were significant differences on two types - state experiencer affective and state experiencer cognitive. When examining the ranks of these two verb types we found that the difference could not be attributed to the difference in experience levels of the counselors.

On percentage of counselor talk, the two low experience counselors were similar, the two medium experience counselors were similar, but there was a significant difference between the two high experience counselors. This suggests that high experience level counselors may have more idiosyncratic styles.

Suggestions for Future Research

Our study was conducted to investigate how years of counseling experience influence a counselor's ability to facilitate the client's expression of feelings. We measured "expression of feelings" by analyzing the counselor's language. We found differences on only one measure, percentage of counselor talk. If there are differences to be found using the linguistic measures described above, the number of counselors at each experience level should be increased. Increasing the N means increasing the amount of data to be analyzed. Editing and analyzing the 12 hours of transcripts used in this study was a formidable task even with the aid of the Computer Assisted Language Analysis System (CALAS). To handle the mass of data generated by studies of this type we need to develop empirically tested sampling techniques that allow us to describe the language

of a counseling session without having to analyze every word of that counseling session.

Another question is this: if the language of a counseling session is different as a function of the counselor's experience level, will the linguistic measures used here tap that difference? This argues for a secondary analysis of these data since we found little difference in the sessions as we measured them. A secondary analysis using a verbal response category stystem (eg. Hill, 1978) would provide a picture of another reality and, if there were differences, might describe them.

Conclusion

This study was exploratory. The question we tried to answer is still an interesting one, but the obvious flaws in the study call for a re-examination of the design of the study and the units of measure we used.

Table 1

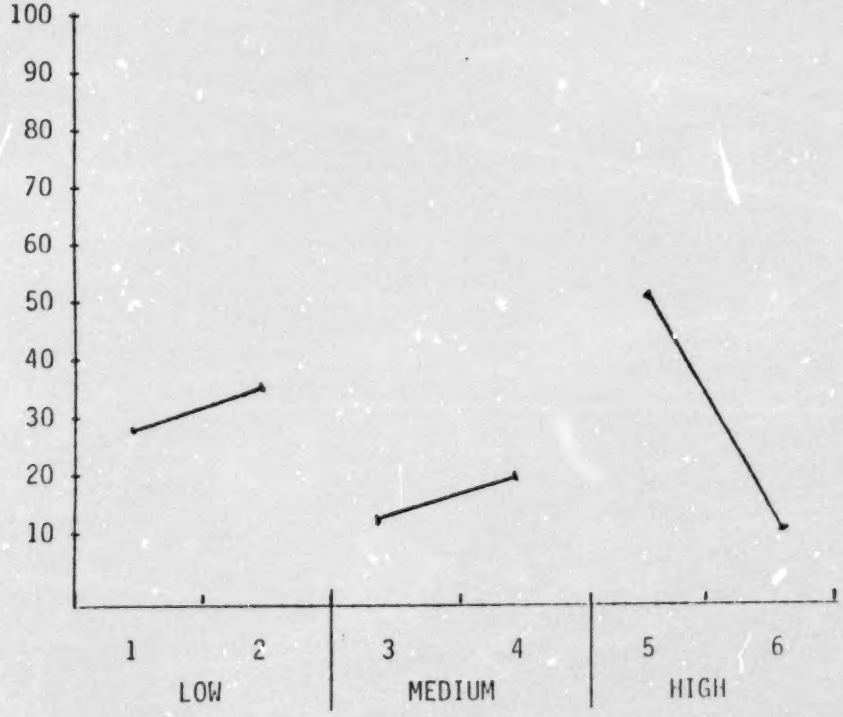
Kruskal-Wallis H Values Between Three Counselor Experience Levels (Low, Med, High) on Seven Verb Types

CATEGORY	STATE (TOTAL)	STATE BASIC	SEC	SEA	ACTION (TOTAL)	ACTION BASIC	AE
H between groups	3.5	3.5	6.5 *	7.07*	3.43	0	0.93

*p <.10

Figure 1

Counselors' Percentage of Talk (Combined Tapes)



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